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ABSTRACT

This is a report of a survey conducted to explore the relationships between dating patterns, dating preferences, and stereotypes of black and white Americans, among black college students on predominantly white campuses. Seventy-eight single black college students, ranging in age from 17 to 22 years old, and attending two predominantly white universities in North Carolina, answered a background information sheet on demographic data. They were then administered a dating survey to assess their actual dating habits and preferences. The survey instrument contained seven questions measuring frequency of going out, type of dating (casual or serious), racial preferences for ideal dates, and racial group(s) dated. Results indicated that: (1) the majority of black students preferred and dated blacks; (2) males were more involved in interracial casual dating than black females; (3) ninety-four percent indicated that they would consider dating a person of another race; and (4) black males had more favorable stereotypes of both black women and white women than the black female students. The report concludes that interracial dating may be more a factor of situational, rather than attitudinal, variables. (Author/AOS)

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Dating Preferences and Patterns of Black Students On Predominantly White Campuses

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Dating Preferences and Patterns of Black Students
On Predominantly White Campuses

Dating patterns, preferences, and racial stereotypes were studied for 44 male, 34 female black college students attending two predominantly white Southern institutions. They were administered a dating survey along with an adjective checklist to measure racial stereotypes. Results indicated that the majority of black students preferred and dated blacks and males were involved in more interracial casual dating than black females. Ninety-four percent indicated that they would consider dating a person of another race. Black males had more favorable stereotypes of both black men and white women than the black female students. Implications of the results are discussed.

In exploring the dating habits of college students, there is a trend towards studying the traits and values desired in a potential mate. Researchers have investigated mate selection and the impact of status-related versus character-related traits (Laner & Coakley, 1974; Melton & Thomas, 1976), physical attractiveness (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Murstein, 1972c), status (Murstein, 1972b), equity (Murstein, 1972a), and sex role attitudes (Hansen, 1980). The greatest limitation of this literature is that it focuses mainly on the white college student, with a paucity of literature available on dating and the black college student. The few studies available have mainly compared black and white mate selection. Melton and Thomas (1976) investigated differences between black and white college students' values concerning mate selection by examining the relative importance of expressive (character-related) and instrumental (status-related) traits in selecting a potential mate. They found that black students generally attach greater importance to the instrumental traits than the white students and the importance of instrumental traits is inversely related to socioeconomic status. However, both black and white students rated expressive traits as more desirable than instrumental characteristics and therefore it was concluded that college students were more concerned with the expressive dimension of marital relationships.

Dickinson (1975) studied the dating behavior of black and white adolescent students before and after desegregation. Evidence supported the hypothesis that the dating behavior of blacks became more parallel to that of whites, while the dating behavior of whites has only changed slightly over time. He suggested that blacks may be using the dominant group as their reference group and therefore modeling their dating behavior. Thus changes in black dating behavior have resulted in more similar dating patterns for blacks and whites.

Lampe (1981) studied interethnic dating among black, Mexican, and white college students. The results indicated that the majority of students, regardless of race, had experienced some interracial dating with males being more active than females and Mexicans more active than blacks or whites. The majority of students stated that they would like to date interracially, excluding the white females. Those who had dated interracially reported dating several times. Black males dated more white than Mexican females. In addition, the Mexicans dated more whites than the blacks did. It was concluded that the greater frequency of male interracial dating was the result of the male-initiated dating system and that if and when females begin initiating more dates their frequency of interracial dating will rise. One limitation of this study is that it doesn't distinguish between casual and serious dating.

Lampe (1982) studied motives for interracial dating and found that the majority of black, white and Mexican college students who dated interracially did so because they liked the other person. Very few students indicated that they interracially dated for sex, curiosity, or to prove a lack of prejudice. Black students who did not interracially date gave as their reasons, "no desire", "no chance", or "hadn't thought of it". Lampe concluded that the motives for dating interracially were the same as for dating intraracially.

Black college students have been virtually ignored in the dating literature. However, with the increase in enrollment of black students on predominantly white campuses over the last 20 years along with desegregation of public schools, one might expect that increased interracial contact may result in increased interracial dating. Gordon (1964) discussed interracial marriage and concluded that "interracial marriages are likely to occur more frequently than hitherto among college-trained Negroes and whites ...Contact-whether it be in school, housing or in employment will have its effect upon the rate of interracial marriage" (p. 270). Although there are articles reporting the incidence of interracial marriage (Heer, 1974; McDowell, 1971), little information is available for interracial dating on predominately white campuses. Also, there have been no attempts to investigate the relationships between the dating preferences and patterns of black college students and their racial

attitudes. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between dating patterns, dating preferences and stereotypes of black and white Americans in black college students on predominantly white campuses. The following were hypothesized: (1) black males would engage more frequently in interracial dating than black females, and (2) those students who prefer and date blacks will have less favorable stereotypes of whites than those students who prefer and date blacks and whites.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 78 unmarried black (44 male, 34 female) college students attending two predominately white universities in North Carolina during the 1982-1983 school year. They ranged in age from 17 to 22 years old.

Procedure

Subjects were first administered a background information sheet gathering demographic data. They were then given a dating survey to assess actual dating habits and preferences. The survey included seven questions measuring the frequency of going out, type of dating (casual or serious), racial preferences for ideal dates, and the racial group(s) dated. Serious dating was defined as a male and female couple who have an almost exclusive relationship (boyfriend/girlfriend), do not openly date other people and have dated for at least one month. Casual dating was

defined as a male and female couple who spend some time together, but openly date other people. An adjective checklist modified from the Katz and Braly Scale (1933) was administered last. Seventy-four of the most frequently selected adjectives from the original 84 adjective checklist were chosen based on findings from a recent study by Clark and Pearson (1982). An additional fifty adjectives were added from the sex-role stereotype research of Williams and Best (1977). The 25 most masculine and the 25 most feminine adjectives as rated by the sex-role stereotype index were randomly added to the Katz and Braly adjectives with care to avoid duplication; resulting in a total of 115 adjectives. The subjects were instructed to read through the list of 115 adjectives and to select five that were most descriptive of black Americans, white Americans, black men, white men, black women and white women in this order. They were then instructed to read through the 115 adjectives and rate each one on its degree of favorability as it is normally used to describe people. They responded by using a Likert type scale with a range from 5 (favorable) to 1 (unfavorable).

RESULTS

Dating Preferences and Patterns

Responses for the first and second survey questions, "How often do you go out for some form of entertainment?", and "With whom do you usually go out?", were combined to form a measure of sociability with scores ranging from 1(go out 3-6 nights a week

with two or more friends) to 3(go out three or less nights a month alone). Sixty percent of the subjects went out at least three nights a week with two or more friends (high sociability), 25% went out at least one night a week with one friend (medium sociability), and the remaining 14% went out three nights a month or less with one friend or alone (low sociability). There was a slight tendency for males to be more active socially than females. Sixty-four percent of the males and 56% of the females were in the high sociability group while 11% of the males and 18% of the females were in the low sociability group.

Sixty-seven percent of the male and 56% of the female subjects reported no serious dating (see Table 1). In addition 47% of the female and 33% of the male subjects did not date casually. Of those who did date there were some sex differences. Forty-two percent of the males casually dated only black females while 26% dated both black and white females. For females the trend was different. Thirty-two percent of the females dated only black males, however only 12% dated both black and white males. For serious dating 32% (males) and 41% (females) dated only blacks. Two percent of the males dated both black and white females while 3% of the females dated only white males. When looking at the relationship between going out and dating it was found that black students who casually dated only blacks (48%) reported going out more frequently (high sociability) than those who dated interracially (24%).

Insert Table 1 about here

Sex differences were also evident in the previous dating patterns of the subjects. The females in the past dated more blacks (56%) than males (37%). Sixty-three percent of the males and 44% of the females reported casually dating interracially. The sex difference was even greater for serious dating. Half of the males previously dated only black females while the remaining 50% dated black and white females. In contrast, 83% of the females had dated only black males and only 17% had interracially dated. None of the males or females had previously dated only whites.

Race appears to be more important in dating preferences than actual habits, especially for black males. Eighty-one percent of all subjects preferred to seriously date blacks while 19% had no racial preference. None of the subjects preferred to seriously date whites. For casual dating 65% of the males preferred dating black females while only 5% preferred to date only white females. More black males (30%) than females (19%) had no racial preference. Although most subjects preferred to date blacks, their previous dating habits indicated they had been dating people of other races, especially males. Sixty-three percent of the males and 44% of the females casually dated interracially.

There is an even greater sex difference for serious dating preferences. Half of the males reported seriously dating only black females and half dated interracially. However, 83% of the females reported seriously dating only blacks and only 17% dated interracially.

Subjects who had no racial preference for casual dating tended to interracially date (64%) more than those who preferred to date blacks (13%). In contrast 87% of those that preferred to date blacks actually dated only blacks casually. For serious dating, 96% of those who preferred blacks dated only blacks, while the remaining 4% dated interracially. Of those subjects who reported no racial preference for serious dating, 100% dated only blacks.

Ninety-four percent (casual dating) and 67% (serious dating) indicated that they would date a person of another race with no apparent sex difference. However, 92% of blacks who preferred to casually date only blacks and 100% of blacks who had no racial preference indicated that they would casually date a person from another race. Regardless of preferences, casual interracial dating was not out of the question. The findings were slightly different for serious dating. Forty percent of those who stated a preference for seriously dating blacks indicated that they would not consider seriously dating a person of another race.

Favorability

Table 2 shows the mean favorability scores of males and females for black and white Americans, black and white men, and black and white women. There were sex differences for the ratings of black men, $t(76) = 1.99$, $p < .05$, and white women, $t(76) = 2.44$, $p < .017$. The males ($\bar{X} = 3.86$) rated black men significantly more favorable than the females ($\bar{X} = 3.52$) and the males also rated white females ($\bar{X} = 3.35$) more favorable than black females ($\bar{X} = 3.11$). Males and females held the most favorable stereotype of their own gender group and the least favorable stereotype of the same-gender other-race group.

Insert Table 2 about here

A series of two-way ANOVAs was calculated with sex and either dating habits or preferences as the independent variables and one of the the groups rated (black Americans, white Americans, black men, white men, black women, white women) as the dependent variable. There was only one significant main effect found for serious dating preferences, $F(1,67) = 4.30$, $p < .04$, and the rating of white women. Subjects who indicated no racial preference ($\bar{X}=3.54$) had significantly more favorable ratings of white women than those who indicated a preference for seriously dating only blacks ($\bar{X} = 3.19$). There were a number of

significant interactions. There was a significant interaction of sex with casual dating, $F(1,43) = 8.23$, $p < .006$; casual preference, $F(1,68) = 6.49$, $p < .01$; and previous casual dating, $F(1,69) = 4.28$, $p < .04$, for the ratings of black Americans. Black males who interracially dated casually made the most favorable ratings ($\bar{X} = 3.88$) while black females who interracially dated made the least favorable ratings ($\bar{X} = 3.34$) of black Americans (see Table 3). The same pattern existed for preferences for casual dating and previous casual dating experience. For the ratings of black women there were significant interactions of sex with casual dating preferences, $F(1,68) = 4.64$, $p < .035$, and serious dating preferences, $F(1,67) = 13.25$, $p < .001$. Again, black males who casually ($\bar{X} = 3.86$) and seriously ($\bar{X} = 3.86$) dated interracially made the most favorable ratings while black females who interracially dated made the least favorable ratings of black women.

Insert Table 3 about here

DISCUSSION

Murstein (1980) stated that the traditional date was disappearing for high school and college students and being replaced by group activities that eventually evolve into pairs. The disappearance of dating is somewhat supported by the present data. Although sixty-percent of the students went out frequently

almost half of the females and a third of the males did not casually date. The numbers of students who seriously dated were even less. It is interesting to note that the black females considered themselves seriously dating more frequently than the black males. One wonders if these males and females differed in the way they evaluated their serious dating status although they were responding to the same definition of serious dating. Sex differences were quite apparent in the overall frequency of going out and dating. Males went out and casually dated more frequently than females. It would be interesting to compare the present findings with similar results from black students on predominantly black campuses to detemine if dating frequency is enhanced by greater contact with blacks.

The majority of the black students, regardless of sex, dated other blacks. This pattern was true for both casual and serious dating. However, there were a number of students who preferred to interracially date casually and seriously (more males than females) supporting the first hypothesis in this study; black males would engage more frequently in interracial dating than black females. The percentage of males sampled who followed this pattern consistently outnumbered the percentage of females sampled in all categories studied. This finding is consistent with results from Dickinson(1971) and Lampe(1981). Since females composed less than half of the black populations at the schools studied, the availability of black females may be an important

factor affecting the dating patterns of black males. Results show that the number of black males who did interracially date casually was less than the number who did not date. Also, few black males admitted to seriously dating white females and no one dated only whites. Along with the data indicating that black males overwhelmingly preferred to date black females the implications are that under different circumstances these black males would not be dating white females at all.

The black college student's date selection may be related not only to availability of desired dating partners but also previous dating history. Black students who have a history of interracial dating in high school may continue this pattern in college. In addition, black students who have a history of own-race high school dating, but a desire to date interracially, may find it easier to actualize their desire in college. Also some may interracially date in college because of the novelty, however, Lampe (1982) found few black students (9%) choosing to date interracially because of curiosity. Thus, some who interracially date in college may have dated only blacks in high school. The data tend to indicate that these black students had considerable experience in interracial dating (casual). The males had more experience and were more likely to be presently involved in interracial dating than the females. Although half of the males indicated that they had previously dated (serious) interracially, very few males admitted any present serious dating

with a white female. If one looks only at the males who casually date close to 67% date black women and 38% date both blacks and whites. Instead of the incidence of interracial dating increasing from high school to college, it decreased. This might be explained by the tendency for college students to become more concerned with marriage and mate selection and therefore are more discriminating about their dating choices(both casual and serious).

The black students in the present study appeared to accept interracial dating as a viable possibility, especially for casual dating. Over 90% of the students indicated that they would date a person from another race. These findings are consistent with Lampe (1981) who found that 71% of the black males and 68% of the black females who did not date interracially indicated that they would like to. Although dating interracially was acceptable, the black students still seemed to prefer dating blacks.

The favorability scores revealed an ethnocentric bias, both males and females held a more favorable stereotype of black than white Americans, findings consistent with Clark and Pearson (1982) who found that since the 1970s black students have held more favorable stereotypes of black than white Americans. Although the stereotype of black men was more favorable than that for white men there was a sex difference. The black males held a more favorable stereotype of black males than the females which

is consistent with findings from Clark and Pearson (Note 1).

Black men held a slightly more favorable stereotype of white women than the black females. The black females' dislike of white females is consistent with previous research and theory. Day (1972) discussed black women and the Women's Liberation concluding that "black women simply don't like white women, and can not relate to them. They believe that they are spoiled, weak, selfish, deceitful, and not to be trusted"(p. 286). These findings were also found in interviews conducted by Fallis (1972). Black females in the present study described white women as materialistic, sneaky, and masculine and described black females as intelligent, sexy, and loyal to family ties indicating that the resentment towards white women still persisted in the 1980s. A similar pattern existed for the black males who described white men as feminine, weak, and self-centered and black men as strong, sexy, and ambitious. These results further support the ethnocentric bias possessed by the black students. Black males preferred to date black females and held more favorable stereotypes of black than white females. A similar pattern existed for black females. The stereotypes held of black and white Americans appeared to parallel their dating preferences.

The second hypothesis was not supported by the present data. Black students who preferred and dated only blacks did not have a

significantly less favorable stereotype of whites than those who dated both blacks and whites. Instead, the black females who casually dated interracially tended to have the least favorable stereotype for all black groups rated and white females. This pattern was also true for casual dating preferences and previous casual dating habits. The findings suggest that black males and females who choose to interracially date may do so for different reasons. These few black females seemed to be rejecting blacks while the males who interracially dated had the most favorable stereotypes of black Americans. It is difficult to generalize about the black female who interracially dates because they were so infrequent in the present study. Therefore, future research is needed to clarify possible sex differences in reasons for interracial dating.

The present study illustrates that attitudes, preferences, and behaviors are not always consistent, thus, some black students who prefer to date blacks instead date whites and still maintain less favorable stereotypes of whites than blacks. It may be that variables such as proximity, availability, reciprocity, and even female-initiated dating may account for the interracial dating behavior. Lampe (1981) concluded from his data that although interracial dating is increasing the ethnocentric nature of groups would limit the extent of intimate intergroup relationships found in dating and marriage. The present findings support this belief.

There are several limitations in generalizing from the present findings. First, the sample includes students from Southern schools only and their responses are probably not representative of students in other regions. Heer (1974) reported that there are fewer interracial marriages in the South than any other region in the United States. Thus, one might expect the frequency of interracial dating to be greater in other regions. Second, the size of the school and the size of the town may have an inpact on availability of desirable mating partners consequently, results may have varied if this study had been conducted at a big ten univeristy and/or a large metropolitan area. Third, college classification may be related to dating patterns but the small size of this sample prohibited analysis by year in school. Fourth, since so few black women date interracially a larger sample is needed to insure an adequate number of these females. Fifth, this study focused only on black students at predominantly white campuses and the results would most certainly vary for black students attending predominantly black institutions.

The literature on dating and black college students is so sparse that there is a definite need for additional studies that incorporate those variables previously mentioned as being absent from the present study. In addition, just as Murstein (1980) stressed the importance of future mate selection research moving towards "understanding the causes rather than correlates of

marital choice"(p. 789), there should be an attempt to go beyond studying the actual dating patterns of blacks to determining the causes of date and mate selection, especial interracial dating. Murstein (1980) predicted that by 1990 research dealing with marital choice or date selection would show that choices would be based moreso on "dynamic aspects of interindividual relationships"(p. 789) than on the typical social factors such as race and social class. In order to determine if this prediction will come true there must be more research investigating the impact of race on social dating and mate selection.

In summary, there are differences in the dating habits of black female and male college students at white institutions. Black students are involved in more casual than serious dating with black males dating more frequently than black females. These students date more black than white students, however, when interracial dating occurs black males are more frequently involved than black females. Interracial dating occurs more often in casual than serious dating. In addition, the majority of the students preferred and did date within their own race. Contrary to popular belief, many black males who were dating white females preferred to date black females, indicating that to date white doesn't necessarily imply a rejection of black women, but instead interracial dating may be more a factor of situational variables.

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Table 1

Dating Habits and Preference, by Sex

	Racial Group Dated						No Dating	
	Black		White		Both			
	M[a]	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Present Dating								
Casual	42	41	0	0	26	12	33	47
Serious	32	41	0	3	2	0	66	56
Previous Dating								
Casual	37	56	0	0	63	44		
Serious	50	83	0	0	50	17		
Dating Preferences								
Casual	65	81	5	0	30	19		
Serious	81	81	0	0	19	19		

Note. All data is presented in percents

[a]M refers to males and F to females

Table 2

Mean Favorability Ratings for Racial and Gender Groups

Group Rates	Male	Female	$t(76)$	p
Black Americans	3.79	3.71	1.08	n.s
White Americans	3.23	3.28	-.41	n.s.
Black Men	3.86	3.52	1.99	.05
White Men	3.23	3.40	-1.49	n.s.
Black Women	3.85	3.93	-.90	n.s.
White Women	3.35	3.11	2.44	.017

Table 3

Favorability Ratings for Black Americans and Black Women by Dating Habits and Preferences, by Sex

	Males		Females	
	Black	Both	Black	Both
Black American				
Casual Dating	3.74	3.88	3.81	3.34
	18	11	14	4
Casual Preferences	3.75	3.86	3.77	3.43
	28	13	25	16
Previous Casual Dating	3.72	3.84	3.79	3.60
	15	26	18	14
Black Women				
Casual Dating	3.75	3.86	3.77	3.43
	28	13	25	6
Serious Dating	3.77	3.86	3.71	3.48
	33	8	27	3

Note. Subjects were classified as dating or preferring only blacks or both blacks and whites. The total number of subjects in each group appear under each mean score.